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# WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY AND HENRY FIELDING

BY FREDERICK S. DICKSON

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THACKERAY once said that his English would have been better had he read Fielding before he was ten. Apparently he did read him when very young for Mr. Grego describes a copy of the first edition of *Joseph Andrews* with marginal drawings by Thackeray, and these sketches, reproduced in *Thackerayana*, are quite in the manner of his school-days. The earliest reference to Fielding in any of Thackeray's writings is in *Caricature and Lithography* in Paris, which appeared first in the *Westminster Review* for April, 1839, and there is another brief reference in the *Paris Sketch Book* of 1840. It was just at this time, also, that Thackeray wrote his first extended criticism on Fielding, in a review of Thomas Roscoe's edition of the works, London, 1840, and printed in the *Times* for September 2d of that year. Here he tells us that "Fielding's men and Hogarth's are Dickens's and Cruikshank's, drawn with ten times more skill and force," and that "the picture of Amelia is the most beautiful and delicious description of a character that is to be found in any writer not excepting Shakespeare." And of *Tom Jones* he says:

"Moral or immoral, let any man examine this romance as a work of art, merely, and it must strike him as the most astounding production of human ingenuity. There is not an incident, ever so trifling, but advances the story, grows out of former incidents and is connected with the whole. Such a literary *providence*, if we may use such a word, is not to be seen in any other work of fiction. It is marvelous to think how the author could have built and carried all this structure in his brain as he must have done before he began to put it on paper."

It was right that Thackeray should think well of Fielding for Thackeray owes more to him than to any other

person or thing, or to *all* other persons and things. It is clear that Thackeray made his first real study of the art of Fielding during 1839 and 1840, and up to that time, although Thackeray's English was of the best, he had not shown even mediocre abilities as a story-teller. For seven years he had been living from hand to mouth as a hack-writer for newspapers and magazines, and the best he could show was *Yellowplush*, *Major Gahagan*, *Catherine*, *Stubbs's Calendar*, *Barber Cox*, and *A Shabby Genteel Story*, the last his most ambitious effort. This latter story was begun in *Fraser* for June, 1840, and continued in July and August. During August, when he should have been writing his next number, he works instead over Fielding, reading, writing, pondering over the man and wondering at his work. This *Times* article of Thackeray's is no perfunctory bit of hack work but a serious study. In the clumsy Roscoe volume he reads *Amelia* and glows in his admiration for it. Without other evidence, without needing other, it seems clear that Thackeray realizing through this study of Fielding the hopeless defects of the story he had been working over becomes discouraged at it all and abruptly closes it out in the October number of the magazine. When the *Shabby Genteel Story* was reprinted in the *Miscellanies* Mr. Thackeray appends a note, dated April 10, 1857, which seems to imply that the story was abruptly finished on account of the illness of his wife, but in a letter to Mrs. Brookfield, written in November, 1850, he says that "twelve days after this Fielding article appeared in the *Times* my poor little wife's malady showed itself," and that would be on September 14th, but the end of the story appeared in the October number of the magazine and so must have been sent off, or at least written, before the middle of September.

In the same letter to Mrs. Brookfield he says: "The *Times* gave me five guineas for the article. I recollect I thought it rather shabby pay." So doubtless it was, and yet what the *Times* gave was nothing to what Fielding gave, for only this made possible the splendid achievements of the coming years. Almost immediately was begun the *Great Hoggarty Diamond*, the first number appearing in *Fraser* for September, 1841, and in December John Sterling writes: "What is there better in Fielding or Goldsmith? There is more truth and nature in one of these papers than in all Dickens's novels together," and Thomas Carlyle gives a grim nod as

he records it. Then in 1844 Thackeray makes a still greater advance in *Barry Lyndon*, and it will ever be a tribute to the ingrained stolidity of the Victorian era that this masterpiece was allowed to remain buried for eleven years in the forgotten pages of *Fraser*. In January, 1847, the first part of *Vanity Fair* appeared, and on its completion in July, 1848, William Makepeace Thackeray took his place by the side of his master, Henry Fielding.

Thackeray fully realized his debt to Fielding and acknowledged it at times generously, and at times curiously. Unfortunately in Thackeray's day little was known of Fielding, and what little there was was buried under a mass of things quite impossible.

So Thackeray was tireless in conjuring up pictures of the profligacy of Henry Fielding, clothing them in sparkling phrases and sending them forth to injurious result. With naught but the imagination to guide or restrain, he shows Fielding, even in the latter years of life, "in a watch or sponging home, fuddled most likely," or "in his tavern chair carousing with Heaven knows whom," "ready for a row, or a bottle, or what you please," "a young fellow upon town with very loose morals indeed, and never seems to have any thought of anything beyond the pleasure of living and being jolly." "If he led a sad, riotous life, and mixed with many a bad woman in his time, his heart was pure as he knew a good one when he found her." Now all this is pure assumption, mere romancing, and if *any* of it is intended to apply to aught but his youthful days it is distinctly untrue.

In a brief sentence in the lecture, Thackeray refers to the Lady Bellaston incident and in the *Times* article not at all. In the *Newcomes*, however, he speaks thus vigorously through the lips of Colonel Newcome.

"*Tom Jones*, sir; *Joseph Andrews*, sir," he cried, twisting his mustachios; "I read them when I was a boy, when I kept other bad company, and did other low and disgraceful things, things of which I'm ashamed now. As for that *Tom Jones*—that fellow that sells himself, sir—by heavens my blood boils when I think of him. I wouldn't sit in the same room with such a fellow, sir. If he came in at that door, I would say, 'How dare you, you hireling ruffian, to sully with your presence an apartment where my friend and I are conversing together? Where two gentlemen, I say, are taking their wine after dinner? How dare you, you degraded villain!'"

All these vigorous words we find in Chapter IV. of the

first volume of the *Newcomes*, but if we turn back to Chapter II. of the same admirable volume we may read the biography of Thomas Newcome, Sr., the father of the Colonel. A successful merchant, with ample means, he is left a widower with one son. With no need to urge, he yet marries Miss Hobson, older than he, with no attractions of mind, manner, or person, simply because she is possessed of a quarter million of pounds sterling. Selling himself for this price he actually receives from his wife nothing save twins, and he lives the rest of his life in a state of humiliating subjection to her. The gardener bows politely to him, but takes his orders from the lady. When he comes to make his will he is forced, through fear of his wife, to divide his little fortune with the twins so that our good Colonel receives but a third of what should have been his just inheritance. Dying before his wife he fails to get any part of the price for which he thought he had sold himself. And Thackeray, venting his wrath upon Tom Jones for the hundred-pound note he got from Lady Bellaston, slaps Thomas Newcome on the back in hearty congratulation and tells us that "every one of his old friends, and every honest-hearted fellow who likes to see shrewdness, and honesty, and courage, succeed was glad of his good-fortune, and said, 'Newcome, my boy' (or 'Newcome, my buck' if they were old city cronies and very familiar) 'I give you joy.'"

Now the differences in these two cases were that one transaction was sanctified by the Church, and in the other no sanctity was pretended; one was a sale for life, the other but for a day or two; one bartered his honor for money he did not get while the other received payment in advance; one, unrepentant, continues the relation till death, the other, repentant, rids himself of it as promptly as possible. Fielding makes us see the evil in Tom Jones, while Thackeray himself never discovered the degradation of Thomas Newcome.

Sir Walter Scott makes the astounding discovery that the Lady Bellaston incident was due to "the unhappy circumstances of his life and of the society to which they condemned him," as if the Lady Bellastons were to be found amongst charwomen, rather than in high life. The truth is that this proves Fielding's intimate knowledge of high life rather than the reverse. Lord Chesterfield tells us

that the great Duke of Marlborough, when he was young John Churchill, ensign of the Guards, was, from the graces of his person, kept by the Duchess of Cleveland, from whom he received at one time no less than five thousand pounds with which he at once cannily purchased an annuity from the Marquis of Halifax. Later, when a duke and rich, he refused to lend the Duchess of Cleveland twenty guineas at basset, and, when an old man, walked to his lodgings at night from the Assembly-room at Bath rather than pay sixpence for chair hire, and all England honors the man who is provident. Miss Edwards, an unmarried lady of great fortune, openly kept Lord Ann Hamilton. General Braddock was kept by a Mrs. Upton, and when he meanly begged for more she declared she had but a few shillings, displaying her purse in proof. Snatching it from her hand he found concealed half a dozen guineas, which he took, and throwing the empty purse in her face exclaimed, "Did you mean to cheat me?" Horace Walpole, who tells the story adds, "And now you know General Braddock." And then again comes Horace Walpole with the story of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu being imprisoned, almost, and her letters opened by a young man *she* had been keeping. It is easy enough to see from all this where Fielding got his material for the creation of Lady Bellaston.

Henry Fielding, great grandson of an earl, a man of wit and education, who would have been welcomed in the ranks of high society, chose for his wife a simple country girl from Salisbury, and on her death married her maid, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, outraged that her cousin should have preferred such a woman to one of her own rank, writes bitterly after his death that "he could find rapture in the arms of his cook-maid," and on this Thackeray and others dwell upon the low character of Fielding's acquaintances. Now it is quite likely that Henry Fielding *did* prefer the Cradocks and even the Mary Daniels of that day to the friends of Lady Mary and Horace Walpole, and if he did it is much to his credit.

But Thackeray insists upon finding disreputable company for him. In the *Times* article he discovers him consorting with the Lady Bettys of Garrick's Company, and "often with other inhabitants of Covent Garden not even so reputable." Now Garrick's first experience as a manager was in the winter of 1747 and by that time Henry

Fielding had discontinued all connection with the theater, had written *Joseph Andrews* and was busy over *Tom Jones*. In the *English Humorists* Mr. Thackeray discovers Fielding "amongst the Oldfields and Bracegirdles behind the scenes." This is an even more unfortunate vagary for Mr. Thackeray. Mrs. Bracegirdle retired from the stage in 1707, the year of Fielding's birth, and only returned to it once in 1709 for Betterton's benefit. When Fielding's first play appeared he was twenty and the lady sixty-four, and it does not appear that he ever met her. Mrs. Oldfield did appear in Fielding's "Love in Several Masques," on February 12, 1728, and did so much toward the success of the play that Fielding acknowledged it generously in the preface. On March 16, 1728, Fielding was certainly in Leyden, from whence he returned about January, 1730, while Mrs. Oldfield died in the following October. During all this time Mrs. Oldfield was the mistress of Colonel Churchill, and the result was a son who married Mary Walpole, the natural daughter of Sir Robert Walpole and "Moll" Skerrit. Mrs. Oldfield was buried in Westminster Abbey, an honor which was denied to Thackeray and which, apparently, no Englishman ever dreamed of conferring upon Henry Fielding.

Indeed, barring the discredited Rigby-Walpole story and Lady Mary's ill-natured fling at the "cook-maid" there is no contemporary evidence at all of Fielding consorting with low or vulgar company. Had there been we may be sure that both Richardson and Dr. Johnson would have exploited it, writ large. As it is, they condemn Fielding for introducing in his stories such low characters as a footman, a coachman, a waiting-woman, and a tavern-keeper, and the fact that they conclude from this that he must have known all these people to be able to describe them proves that they could have no other evidence than this. As well might we condemn for low association the creators of Bill Sykes and Sam Weller, or of Captain Costigan and Fred Bayham.

As to Fielding's relations with women the only witness we have that we can call contemporary is Arthur Murphy and he says that, "though disposed to gallantry by his strong animal spirits and the vivacity of his passions, he was remarkable for tenderness and constancy to his wife and the strongest affection for his children." And the sturdiest friend of William Makepeace Thackeray could

not say more nor better of him. Asked to name Thackeray's heroines one instinctively begins with Becky Sharp and Beatrix Esmond, and then pauses, for it makes little difference who is named next. The good ones, the Amelias, the Ethels, and the rest, fail to interest, for in them all there is nothing vivid, nothing clear, nothing *alive*. Why, Blanche Amory, slight as she is, has more life in her than a dozen Lauras! On the contrary, try Fielding by the same test, and just as unhesitatingly we pick out the good ones, and name Sophia Western and Amelia Booth. Fielding's bad women, like Thackeray's good ones, are negligible. Though as much alive as the good ones they still do not count. We do not care for Mrs. Fitzpatrick, or Lady Bellaston, or Miss Matthews any more than we do for Laura Pendennis, or Ethel Newcome, or Amelia Sedley. It is clear that Thackeray best knew the shady-lady type and drew it with surer and stronger hand than he did or could draw the faithful wife and mother. So here is better evidence than either carping or fulsome critic can furnish as to one aspect in the lives of these two great men.

When Thackeray began to write *Vanity Fair* it was with the vision of Fielding's *Amelia* in his mind, and with the evident intention of reproducing in some measure at least the charms of the eighteenth-century heroine. He gave her the same name, as if determined that she should be loved for her virtues as was her elder, and yet, in the very first chapter, when Becky, the bad, tosses Johnson's dictionary at the feet of the astonished Jemima, we adore the little devil, and Amelia, the good, has lost her chance forever. Thackeray early realizes the hopeless nature of his task and frankly takes the heroine's crown from Amelia to place it on Becky's chestnut locks. In the end we all hope that Becky got enough out of that fool Joseph to make her comfortable. On the other hand, Fielding's Amelia is kept in the background and Miss Fanny Matthews holds the center of the stage for a couple of weeks before Amelia arrives unexpectedly in the prison parlor, and yet, on the instant, we love Amelia and detest Miss Matthews. From the beginning we are unable to understand the infatuation of Colonel James and finally we take infinite comfort as the lady grows "immensely fat."

Thackeray cordially admired Fielding for the lights and shadows of his character-drawing and says: "The virtues



which he exhibits shine out by their contrasts with the vices which he paints so faithfully as they never could have done if the latter had not been depicted as well as the former," and so when he sets out to tell what manner of man Fielding was he uses the same art to make Fielding's virtues more prominent, and if he fails to find the necessary vices for his picture he does not hesitate to invent them. For the sake of his art he will sacrifice the artist he so cordially admired. And in all this there is a brave show of candor and doubtless his voice trembled as he said, "Let us then not accuse Fielding of immorality," and he protests he cannot make a hero of him. "Why hide his faults?" he asks as he proceeds to invent new ones. Is this too harsh a sentence? Let us face the facts. Roscoe, whose memoir Thackeray had been reading in 1840, says "that Fielding was frequently known to return late at night from a convivial meeting and proceed to read and make extracts from the most abstruse authors before he retired to rest." This story Roscoe got from Murphy who got it apparently from hearsay. In any event there is nothing more to be known of the matter as Murphy apparently was the first to give it to print. Now this did not suit Mr. Thackeray's point of view at all, for it indicated sobriety and moderation, as no man when drunk can read and note abstruse authors, and therefore Mr. Thackeray writes in the *Times*, "They say he used to come home from a supper party, and after tying a wet cloth around his head would begin to read as stoutly as the soberest man in either of the Temples." Thereafter this figure became the central object on Thackeray's picture of Fielding. He uses again almost these exact words in the lectures on *The Humorists*, just as the lolling red tongue of the dog shines out in Sargent's famous portrait of Wertheimer, and Thackeray intended the stroke for just such an artistic purpose. There was nothing of malice in this, only too great devotion to art. Again, to lighten up a page in *Pendennis*, which Thackeray may have thought dull, he exhibits Fielding with his "wet towel round his head, dashing off articles at midnight for the *Covent Garden Journal*, while the printer's boy is asleep in the passage."

The outlines of Mr. Thackeray's picture being settled, he summons imagination to fill in the details. Thackeray sober must discover Fielding drunk. "His muse had sung the loudest in tavern choruses, had seen the daylight stream-

ing over thousands of emptied bowls and reeled home to chambers on the shoulders of the watchman." In *Amelia* we are told, as was Mr. Thackeray told, that "the watchmen in our metropolis are chosen out of those poor old decrepit people, who are from their want of bodily strength rendered incapable of getting a Livelihood by Work." It required the abounding imagination of a Thackeray to see such a one bearing homeward the stalwart form of Fielding. And the "emptied bowles by the thousands." This is creation. "Let there be bowles!" And there were bowles! That Fielding drank in his youthful days, as most Englishmen then drank, is most likely. Murphy testifies to this as does Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. But she knew nothing of his latter days, as she left England in July, 1739, not to return until after his death. Under the influence of drink many a genius has dashed off a short story or a poem, but the world has yet to see genius capable of sustained effort, such as we find in *Tom Jones*, while under the influence of liquor, or with a brain clouded by over-indulgence in the past. Either Henry Fielding did not drink as Thackeray insists he drank, or else some other hand than his penned *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*. The incongruity is so manifest that the early biographers from Murphy to Thackeray ought to have seen that the man, Fielding, could not have been what they were insisting he was, and yet have accomplished what they knew he did.

In all his historical efforts Mr. Thackeray avoids the use of dates, and, of course, they do in a measure hamper and retard the imagination. "Once I wrote a tragedy," confessed Herbert Spencer to Huxley. "I know the plot!" exclaimed Huxley. "Impossible!" insisted Spencer, "for till now I never told of its existence." "Yet I know," persisted Huxley, "it was a beautiful theory killed by a nasty, ugly, little fact." Thackeray tells us the stock story of Fielding's wife inheriting a little fortune from her mother, and Fielding at the same time a small one from his mother, amounting in all to five or six thousand pounds, and how he retired to the country and in three years spent it all on horses and hounds and riotous living, in all of which there is to be found scarcely any truth at all. Fielding's mother died in 1718, leaving six children and an estate of about £3,000. Three years later the net income of the estate was £150, giving £25 a year for the education of each child. On

February 12, 1735, Henry Fielding was living at No. 12 Buckingham Street, London. On February 25th the will of Elizabeth Cradock was proved and by it Fielding's wife got about £1,500. With this the couple probably retired to Fielding's little farm-house at East Stour. They scarcely could have remained there a full year, for by March 6, 1736, Fielding had written "Pasquin," leased a theater, gathered together a company of players, and had begun his career as a manager. He could not have spent all his wife's money, as he must have had some capital to enable him to secure this lease and form a company. Nor did he then spend his mother's estate at East Stour, for he only sold his interest in this property in Trinity term, 1738, after he had begun the study of the law, and with the proceeds of the sale he must have supported his family during the period of his study. On July 9, 1739, he wrote to Mr. Nourse asking for a house of a rent of £40, near the Temple, showing that even then his resources were not exhausted. Thus is the beautiful theory of horses and hounds, and liveries and revels, killed by "nasty, ugly, little facts." Chatting with Bayard Taylor about his projected *History of the Reign of Queen Anne*, Thackeray said: "I want to absorb the authorities gradually, so that when I come to write, I shall be filled with the subject and can sit down to a continuous narrative without jumping up every moment to consult somebody." This was Thackeray's conception of History; our conception of Fiction.

Thackeray fancies "young Fielding from Leyden rushing upon the feast with his great laugh and immense healthy young appetite, eager and vigorous to enjoy," and he describes the friends he won, the good clothes he wore, the debts he made, and the easy manner in which he borrowed from his friends, "and bore down upon them for a dinner or a guinea," and "to supply himself with the latter he began to write theatrical pieces." All of which is mere fancy and unkindly fiction, for Fielding began to write for the stage before he ever went to Leyden, and without waiting to get into debt. In the midst of his study there he wrote *Don Quixote in England*, which Mr. Thackeray might have learned by a glance at page 991 of the book he was reviewing, and this little fact would have left one less windmill at which to tilt. He comes from Leyden, about January 1, 1730, and on the 26th of the month is produced the

“ Temple Beau ” at Goodman’s Fields, followed March 10th by the “ Author’s Farce ” at the Haymarket, and later by “ Tom Thumb ” and the “ Coffee-House Politician ” at the same theater. Four plays, written and produced in one year, by a youth of twenty-three, leaves little time for intemperance, and less cause for borrowing or sponging. How unkind is the suggestion of “ bearing down upon his friends for a dinner or a guinea,” and how Thackeray would have shrunk, as from a blow, if one had described him as bearing down thus upon the Brookfields, or the host of the little brown house in New York! How we all delight in giving dinners to those of our friends who do not need them! Many’s the dinner Thackeray got which the honest host was glad to give. How proud would one of us be, if we, or one of our grandsires, had been able to step into that little sunshiny arbor at Margate and to carry off Mr. Titmarsh to dinner, and to slip into his hands the hundred-pound note he needed so badly then, to be returned, of course, when fortune smiled upon him. And here is the real Ralph Allen—how we admire and envy him for sending £200 to Henry Fielding when, it is said, he then knew him not at all. And what a wise investment for Allen, assured thereby of fame as long as shall live Tom Jones and his left-handed uncle, Thomas Allworthy!

Mr. Thackeray declares that Fielding “ would have been very successful at the bar, but for certain circumstances ” and adds, “ These ugly circumstances always fall in the way of men of Fielding’s genius,” just as they were to fall in the way of Thackeray’s genius a little later. The truth is that both men were called to the bar in middle life and neither could afford to wait. “ It is a pity Fielding did not live on his income,” exclaims Thackeray, and here is the root of the whole matter: Fielding refused to be prosperous, and than that no man can commit a crime more flagrant in the eyes of an Englishman, and an American simply cannot understand such a creature at all.

An author realizes the danger in seeking autobiography in fiction and yet authors, of all men, seem most prone to this error. Thackeray constantly does this with Fielding and with no contemporary authority, save Lady Mary, who thinks she sees Fielding in Booth, and yet was out of the country during most of Fielding’s married life, and so also Samuel Richardson, who, with no opportunity for judg-

ing, says, "Tom Jones is Fielding himself, hardened in some places, softened in others." Thackeray fastens lovingly on both theories and says: "He is himself the hero of his books; he is wild Tom Jones, he is wild Captain Booth, less wild, I am glad to think than his predecessor, at least heartily conscious of demerit and anxious to amend." And later he deplures "Jones's fondness for drink and play; Booth's fondness for play and drink, and the unfortunate position of the wives of both gentlemen." Now nowhere do we find Mr. Jones displaying the least fondness for either play or drink. Only once is he on record as taking too much wine, and that was on the occasion of Mr. Allworthy's recovery from serious illness, and this slip we can readily excuse. Evidently he did not take much too much, for within the hour he was sober enough to vanquish at fisticuffs both the Rev. Thwackum and Bliffl, and instead of taking offense at this we cannot help wishing he had taken a mite too much long before. As for the "play," if we are to believe his biographer, he never gambled at all. But this satisfies not Thackeray. Tom Jones and Harry Fielding were one and the same, and in such an age Fielding must have drunk deeply and played heavily, and therefore Tom Jones did likewise, and if Fielding failed to record it he failed in his duty to the reader. This is Thackeray's attitude and if it is bad history, so much the worse for History.

Some biographers of Fielding think they find a touch of autobiography when the author says to Minos at the gates of Elysium that:

"I confess'd I had indulged myself very freely with Wine and Women in my Youth, but had never done an Injury to any Man living, nor avoided an Opportunity of doing good; that I pretended to Very little Virtue more than general Philanthropy, and private Friendship."

Now this may be autobiography and it may not be, but it is not a whit more likely to be such than is this passage from the *Paris Sketch Book* of Mr. Titmarsh:

"The life of the young artist is the easiest, merriest, dirtiest existence possible. Each gentleman has his favorite tobacco pipe; and the pictures are painted in the midst of a cloud of smoke, and a din of puns and choice French slang, and a roar of choruses, of which no one can form an idea who has not been present at such an assembly. How he passes his evenings, at what theaters, at what guinguettes, in company with what seducing little milliner, there is no need to say; but I know one who pawned his coat to go to a carnival ball and walked abroad very cheerfully in his blouse for six weeks, until he could redeem the absent garment."

And if both be true, what then? And if it was Mr. Michael Angelo Titmarsh who wore his *blouse* abroad and was with the questionable little milliner at the more questionable guinguette, what then? Was either less admirable as a writer? And should we who have not confessed as frankly be emboldened to throw stones? What did we expect from either man? Did we look for such a confession as was made by Mrs. Pilkington's grandsire, Colonel Meade, the father of twenty-one children, "a man of Fortune and in the Army," who declared on his death-bed "that he never had either when a Bachelor, or a Married Man, criminal conversation with a Woman; never was drunk; never broke his Word; nor ever us'd Tobacco." It is said that once the delightful Joseph Choate made some personal and complacent remark in the presence of the late Thomas B. Reed, sometime Speaker of the House, whereat an admiring bystander remarked, "My! I wish I could say that!" "Why don't you?" asked Reed. "Choate did."

Would we admire either Thackeray or Fielding more had their confession been as was that of the doughty Colonel Meade? And, in any event, do we want a confession from either? Be sure, their wives asked for none, so why should we? There is doubtless much in the novels of both men that they not only saw but bore a part in, but how much is truth and how much fiction, and which is truth and which is fiction, they being dead, no one on earth can say. For me I am content to believe that the best that can be found in Arthur Pendennis, in George Warrington, in Clive Newcome, or in Henry Esmond was Thackeray's own self, and that in the manliness of Tom Jones, in the devotion of Captain Booth to wife and children and in the faithfulness of Joseph Andrews, I am able to discover the real Harry Fielding. You cannot make such a sturdy creature as Fielding out of the weaknesses of Captain Booth, alone, any more than you can create the big and generous Thackeray out of nothing but the selfishness of Pendennis.

Probably we would fail to find in all literature two men more alike in manners, morals, and the way fate served them than these two—Henry Fielding and his admirable follower, William Makepeace Thackeray; and their points of contact, even the trivial ones, are more marked than the lines of divergence.

Thackeray's great-grandfather was Archdeacon of Sur-

rey, Fielding's was Earl of Desmond. Thackeray's grandfather a writer in the East India Company and President of the Board of Revenue; Fielding's was canon of Salisbury. Thackeray's father was a writer, collector, and judge of Ramgath in India; Fielding's a lieutenant-general in the English army. Good men, with good wit for both—Fielding with rather the best of it in English eyes.

When Thackeray was ten years old he went to Charterhouse, as did Fielding to Eton at twelve. Thackeray's father died when he was four and Fielding was eleven when he lost his mother. Thackeray had a stepfather and Fielding a stepmother after the usual proper delay. Thackeray spent a year and a half at Cambridge and Fielding about the same time in Leyden. Thackeray studied law in London and then gave it up, from distaste. Fielding studied law in Leyden and gave it up from scarcity of funds. At Eton and Leyden Fielding was studious. He says, "Tuscan and French are in my head; Latin I write and Greek I read." Thackeray was certainly less of a scholar, did not make as good use of his time at Charterhouse and Cambridge, and palpably envied Fielding's superior attainments.

Thackeray lost the money his father left him, said to be about £20,000, some at the gaming-table, and as much in unwise newspaper ventures. Fielding got rid of his little estates, of possibly £2,000 in all, in part by gentleman farming and the rest at the price of being called to the bar. Thackeray started life as an artist and failed, then as a writer of reviews, and sketches and what not, and struggled with misfortune for years. Fielding did support himself, barely, as a playwright, and struggled with misfortune just as Thackeray did after him.

Thackeray went back to the law and was called to the bar at the age of thirty-seven. Fielding went back to the law and at thirty-three was likewise called. At thirty-eight Thackeray tried strenuously for an appointment as magistrate. At forty-one Fielding was made magistrate. Thackeray married when he was twenty-seven and poor. Fielding was married at twenty-five and was just as poor. Thackeray's wife lost her mind when he was twenty-nine; Fielding's wife died when he was thirty-six. Thackeray's wife survived him thirty years; Fielding, marrying a second time, his wife survived him more than forty-seven years, dying on May 11, 1802. Thackeray died at the age of fifty-two,

and Fielding was forty-eight. With more of care both should have lived much longer, but both were careless.

Thackeray was generous and improvident and saved little or nothing until the lecturing days. Fielding was equally generous and improvident, and died poor, there being for him no lecturing days. Thackeray was jovial in disposition until he became prosperous, then less so. Fielding, apparently, was even more jovial, and, never becoming prosperous, remained jovial to the end. According to Dean Hole, Thackeray was six feet three inches in height, and his pictures show his broad shoulders. Murphy tells us that "Fielding was in stature rather rising above six feet, his frame of body large and remarkably robust."

Anthony Trollope accused Thackeray of idleness; Thackeray said Fielding was idle—both were wrong. Thackeray and Fielding both wrote under the urging of need. As successful stockbrokers neither would have doubtless written.

Thackeray was part owner in two newspapers, was editor of one magazine, and early in life was eager to try more. Fielding had four papers and did not rid himself of the habit till he had rid himself of his health. Thackeray produced his first great story, *Barry Lyndon*, when he was thirty-three. Fielding was thirty-five when *Joseph Andrews* appeared. Thackeray at forty-one gave the world *Esmond* and the world was gratified. At forty-two Fielding invented *Tom Jones*, and the world was more gratified, for, without *Tom Jones*, *Ivanhoe*, *David Copperfield* and *Vanity Fair* could not have been. Thackeray was forty-four when the *Newcomes* was completed; Fielding forty-four when *Amelia* was published. Thackeray went to Egypt and told of it in *From Cornhill to Grand Cairo*; Fielding went to Spain and told of it even more intimately in the *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*.

Thackeray tells us that Fielding spent much of his time in taverns, and taverns were the clubs of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth, Thackeray belonged to the "Garrick," the "Reform," the "Athenæum," the "Travelers," "Our Club," and, appropriately, was a founder of the "Fielding." These six not sufficing, he dropped in at the Cyder Cellars, the Coal Hole, or Evans's.

"The best talker I ever listened to," said Dean Hole of Thackeray. "With more wit than all those you have named," said Lord Lyttleton of Fielding.



Where can we find two figures, looming large as these two, who could have changed places with so little loss to the world? Had Thackeray lived in the early eighteenth century the "Wolves and the Lamb" might have been acted at Goodman's Fields, and on the rest of the plays he would have written he might have lived. Under like conditions he could have invented the modern novel, and, unconstrained, have created a more sentimental *Tom Jones*, and reveled in it. Fielding, hedged in by amazing Victorian years, would have written a more ironical *Pendennis*, chafing, declaring to the world that "since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a *man*."

Others before Thackeray wrote of Fielding, and wrote as he did, but the difference is that Thackeray's views count and count for much, while those others count for little, or count not at all. Speaking of his own early work Thackeray said, "They were small potatoes," and then added, whimsically, "but they were good small potatoes." And they *were* good, so good that after more than half a century they still count, as the big potatoes of lesser men do not.

And if no one, save Thackeray, has said so many harsh things of Fielding, and as no one has said them with such conviction, so also no one has said so many fine things of the eighteenth-century genius, and said them so glowingly.

"He has an admirable natural love of truth, the keenest instinctive antipathy to hypocrisy, the happiest satirical gift of laughing it to scorn. His wit is wonderfully wise and detective; it flashes upon a rogue and lightens up a rascal like a policeman's lantern. He is one of the manliest and kindest of human beings; . . . he respects female innocence and infantine tenderness, as you would suppose such a great-hearted, courageous soul would respect and care for them. He could not be so brave, generous, truth-telling as he is were he not infinitely merciful, pitiful, and tender. He will give any man his purse—he can't help kindness and profusion. . . . He admires with all his heart good and virtuous men, stoops to no flattery, bears no rancor, disdains all disloyal acts, does his duty uprightly, is fondly loved by his family and dies at his work."

Only one man could have written that fine passage—Henry Fielding! And of only one other man could he have written it—William Makepeace Thackeray!

FREDERICK S. DICKSON.